

MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY
5000 Piedmont Avenue
Oakland
Alameda County
California

HALS CA-39
CA-39

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY

HALS NO. CA-39

Location: 5000 Piedmont Avenue, Oakland, Alameda County, CA
Lat: 35.49880 Long: -122.14637

Significance: Mountain View Cemetery certainly qualifies under criteria B - association with persons significant in our past because it was designed by Frederic Law Olmsted. Mountain View was Olmsted's first solo project and is the only cemetery he designed. It might also qualify under criteria A because it was one of the earliest detached cemeteries in the Western United States. The California Cemetery Act was passed in 1859 and Mountain View opened in 1865. Mountain View was the premier place to be buried in California and set a new standard for burial places. Mountain View and other "garden" cemeteries were a new concept that started with Mount Auburn. According to author Douglas Keister, "These cemeteries were so beautiful they became a major source of inspiration for the "City Beautiful" movement and our subsequent public parks." Mountain View also qualifies under criteria C because it possesses high artistic value. According to Keister, "Mountain View Cemetery is one of the most attractively sited cemeteries in the United States."

Deacription: Mountain View cemetery occupies 226 acres of land in the Oakland hills. A portion of the grounds are level and it is here that Olmsted laid out a formal entry with roads in a diamond-shaped pattern. Much of the cemetery is hilly where Olmsted planned curving paths and roads that climb up the slopes at either side of a formal, allee. The main allee starts at the level entry and extends one half mile up along a gentle slope. Four carrefours (crossroads) or nodes punctuate the allee where Olmsted's plan called for a public monument at each. Two of these nodes plus the circle at the entrance now have pools with fountains - a gift from one of the original trustees - Anthony Chabot who made his fortune partly by establishing municipal water systems.

As described in a narrative written in May 1865 to Major Ralph W. Kirkham then president of the Board of Trustees, Olmsted envisioned a place for all persons to be buried, he wrote, "a place of our common grief, our common hopes and our common faith; a place wherein we may see and feel our sympathy one with another ... where all elements of society would be provided for ... so that the community of the dead would be an object lesson for the community of the living". Olmsted's design concept included areas designated for different fraternal organizations, an area for persons of Jewish descent, Chinese and even places for paupers to be buried - a Redwood grove on a gentle slope just inside the cemetery gate is a "potter's field".

The general layout envisioned by Olmsted is closely reflected in the cemetery today. What is dramatically different is the number of species of trees and under-planting of lawn. Olmsted intended native grasses, lots of shrubs and five species of trees - Italian cypress, cedar of Lebanon, stone pine, Monterey cypress, and evergreen oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). Olmsted wrote, "With a judicious combination of the three forms of foliage which I have thus indicated, you have all that is necessary for the composition of an impressive scene possessing a very distinctive kind of beauty. It would be not only be effective and appropriate in form and color, but its association and poetic suggestion would be in the highest degree fitting to your purpose. The brooding forms of the coppices and the canopy of the cedars would unite in the expression of a sheltering care extended over the place of the dead, the heaven-pointing spires of the immortal cypress would prompt the consolations of faith."

Today 80+ species of trees are found throughout the cemetery and essentially all of the unpaved land is covered by irrigated turf. The abundance of shrubs that can be seen in an 1885 photograph by Frank Rodolph included in Dennis Evanosky's book on Mountain View Cemetery, are now gone – eliminated no doubt to facilitate mowing the lawns. Three ponds were added to provide a supply of water for irrigating. Date Palms and many Eucalyptus, which Olmsted specifically wrote should not be planted, are found in abundance.

Olmsted intended that the area just inside the cemetery gate provide ample space for "waiting and assemblage" of mourners and it functions that way currently. The upper terraces of the cemetery offer spectacular views of the bay and the City of San Francisco. It is here that the elite of California chose as their final resting place, which became known as Millionaire's Row.

History: Four years after the California Cemetery Act was passed in 1859, the original trustees of Mountain View Cemetery met and organized a non-profit association. In addition to Anthony Chabot and Ralph Kirkham who was a civil war general, the original trustees included Dr. Samuel Merritt, their first president, Joseph Emory, founder of the City of Emeryville, and I.H. Brayton from whom they purchased the land to build the new "garden" cemetery. Hiram Tubbs, proprietor of the Tubbs Hotel in downtown Oakland, was also an original trustee.

Once the land was purchased the trustees sought out Olmsted who was known for his work in New York's Central Park and who was in California at the time. Olmsted came to California to manage the 44,000 acre Mariposa Gold Mine located on land once owned by Gen. John C. Fremont. Olmsted arrived in Bear Valley, California in August of 1863 and was immediately put off by what he found – a community ruled by violence, alcoholism and exploitation. Not long after Olmsted's arrival the mine closed and it was at this time that the Mountain View trustees invited him to lay out their new cemetery.

When the design and initial preparation were complete the cemetery was consecrated May 25, 1865 and quickly became the premier place to be buried attracting the elite of California, including such notables as: Charles Crocker one of the Big 4 who built the transcontinental railroad and later founded Crocker Bank; Henry Durant, founder of what became the University of California; Ina Coolbrith, California's first poet laureate; James Folger who created Folgers Coffee Company; Domingo Ghirardelli, the chocolate king; three generations of the Pardee family that included two Mayors of Oakland and one California Governor; famed architects Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan, the first woman to graduate from the Ecole de Beaux Arts; Col. John Coffee "Jack" Hays, the most famous Texas Ranger landscape painter, Thomas Hill; author Frank Norris who wrote "The Octopus" and "McTeague"; sculptor, Douglas Tilden; industrialist, Henry J. Kaiser whose shipyards played a key role in the Allied forces victory in WWII and whose medical foundation provides quality health care to this day; Warren and Steven Bechtel, who founded and built the largest engineering firm in the world; Elizabeth Short aka "The Black Dahlia"; and numerous other state governors and legislators.

Mountain View includes many monuments designed by the leading architects of their time. The state's wealthy spared no expense in planning monuments to themselves or their loved ones. Henry Daniel Cogswell who made his fortune in land speculation commissioned a 70-foot granite obelisk topped with a five-pointed crystal star. It was made on the East Coast and according to Keister required 38 freight cars to be shipped to California. Once it arrived at the terminus of the transcontinental railroad in Oakland, "the 30-ton obelisk was placed on a special wagon shipped from the East. Try as they might, twenty-four horses couldn't get the wagon to budge. Eventually, a combination of house-moving equipment and a traction engine inched the obelisk up Cemetery Avenue to the Cogswell plot."

The cemetery office, the Tower Chapel and the Gothic Chapel were all designed by architects, Weeks & Day. Day's father, Sherman Day, is buried at Mountain View, as is John London, step-father of author Jack London.

Sources: "Preface to the Plan for Mountain View Cemetery", by Frederic Law Olmsted, May 1865.

Mountain View docents training material prepared by Barbara Smith and Gaye Lenehan.

"Going Out In Style - The Architecture of Eternity" by Douglas Keister, published by Facts On File, Inc., 1997.

"Frederick Law Olmsted - Designing the American Landscape", by Charles E. Beveridge and Paul Rocheleau, edited and designed by David Larkin, published by Rizzoli International Publications, 1995.

"Mountain View Cemetery", Dennis Evanosky, published by Stellar Media Group, 2007.

"Historic Cemetery Bares Architect's Vision" newspaper column by Steven Lavoie, Oakland.

"Historic Mountain View", article for Oakland Heritage Alliance newsletter, by Annalee Allen

"A Feast for the Eyes and the Soul", Montclairion article by Erika Mailman.

"Mountain View Cemetery Was Olmsted's First Solo Design", by Sam Whiting, San Francisco Chronicle article, July 6, 1999.

Historian: Chris Pattillo, Landscape Architect, October 24, 2009
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Cogswell monument left of center and typical curvilinear plot with variety of exotic trees (Chris Pattillo, September 13, 2009).



Charles Crocker monument on the left, Frederick Delger on the right, Oakland's first multi-millionaire who made his fortune as a wholesale shoe salesman. San Francisco Bay in the background (Chris Pattillo, September 13, 2009).